



American International University Bangladesh Convocation

American International University Bangladesh (AIUB)

February 3, 2018; 10:30 - 12:15

Mr. Nurul Islam Nahid, M.P., Minister of Education;

Professor Abdul Mannan, Chairman of the University Grants Commission;

Mr. Ishtiaque Abedin, Chairman of the American International University

Bangladesh Board of Trustees;

Dr. Carmen Lamagna, Vice Chancellor of American International University;

Distinguished guests, students, and families:

Assalam-u-Alaikum, nomoshkar, and good morning!

What an honor it is to be with all of you at the 18th Convocation of American International University Bangladesh to celebrate the accomplishments of today's graduates and to commend the dedication and commitment of AIUB's esteemed faculty, staff, administration, and, of course, the parents, guardians and family members who worked endlessly; who put in countless days and nights to make sure their daughters and sons could be here today. Thank you for inviting me to be part of today's festivities and congratulations to all of you!



I just marked my third year as U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh. It has been a remarkable three years. Every day I am amazed to see how similar our countries are, and how Americans and Bangladeshis are connected by many of the same values, hopes, and aspirations.

One of the strongest connections between Bangladesh and the United States is our profound respect for education, commitment to teaching, and passion for learning.

A university education changes a person's life. A university with a mission to educate a generation of new leaders, like AIUB is changing its community and helping advance Bangladesh for years to come.

I want to thank Chairman Abedin, Vice Chancellor Lamagna, administrators, and all of the AIUB faculty and staff for your hard work. I would like to recognize, again, the families who have supported today's graduates. To all of the parents, guardians, spouses, siblings, friends, members of the community and students themselves who have provided tuition fees and expenses, helped today's graduates study, provided guidance, mentoring and encouragement, I say to all of you, "well done!" AIUB's Class of 2018 is here today because you helped them. Graduates, please give a round of applause to those who helped you get here today.



To all of today's 2,625 graduates, I'd like to emphasize that you have made an investment in yourselves. The degrees you earned today are a result of your financial investment, hours upon hours of studying, sleepless nights, and time away from your families. You have earned a degree that will be a significant part of who you are from this day forward. Congratulations!

All of you have been given a rare opportunity: a university education. Today you enter a privileged and tiny group of global citizens. Only seven percent of the world's entire population has a university education. Only seven percent.

Today you will walk away with something far more important than a new degree or a new title. Today you will walk away with a new responsibility, a responsibility to serve your communities and to improve the lives of those around you. Your graduation is not the culmination or the end of your hard work, it is the next step in a life-long pursuit of learning and service.

As you start this next phase of your journey, I want to leave you with two thoughts. First, I encourage you to be open to wherever your path may lead, to be open to new ideas and new relationships, and to never let your passion fade.

When I was a university student, I had never heard about the Foreign Service, our diplomatic corps in the United States. I studied history and education



overseas, my singular passion. I knew how important education is and I was inspired by the teachers who changed my life.

But immediately after graduation, I ended up in a manufacturing job at Procter and Gamble. With hard working men and women, I helped produce cleaning and home supplies—a job very different from teaching. But producing a good quality product in an ethical manner was not fulfilling for me, though it did allow me repay my student loans! So, two years later, I attended Georgetown University where I learned about the Foreign Service, and after graduating, began my career as a U.S. diplomat.

Today you might graduate with a degree in business, engineering, English, or fine arts, but many of you may find work in a completely different field, a career seemingly unrelated.

Don't worry. Everything you have learned here at AIUB will be of use to you.

Your AIUB education, and the lessons you've learned from your professors and mentors here, will continue to guide you regardless of where your path may lead.



My path has been full of twists and turns, but my commitment to education and to service has not changed. And now, after almost 37 years as a U.S. diplomat, serving on four continents, I am honored to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh.

I may not be a teacher, but my team at the U.S. Embassy is working in schools throughout Bangladesh to promote primary education, English language learning, and to provide Bangladeshi teachers and professors training on the most up-to-date teaching methods.

One of the most important lessons I've learned as I've traveled across the world, is that regardless of the job you have—as a teacher, a business leader, a government worker—you have to be open to new ideas and new relationships.

The second point I want to make has to do with how you can best interact with others in your world and not to lose sight of the difference you can make. One of my favorite activists and songwriters Peter Seeger was one of a few white musicians to perform with African American musicians in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. He popularized an old hymn sung by African American tobacco farm workers you here in Bangladesh know very well – the Civil Rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.”



Pete Seeger's words are as true today as ever before when he said, "It's a very important thing to *learn to talk to people you disagree with.*" Thanks to social media in particular, it is more difficult than ever to interact with and get to know people who are different from you. It is too easy to hear only points of view you agree with or with which you are comfortable. Yet, we must reach out those with whom we disagree if we ever hope to overcome the many problems our world faces and thus improve it.

As the problems we face in our communities, in our countries, and around the world become more complex and seem more intractable, all of you, as AIUB graduates and young leaders, have an obligation to engage different perspectives, new ideas, and to create new relationships. It is when we embrace our differences, constructively and peacefully, that we move our cities, communities, countries and the world forward.

We recently celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the United States and at the Embassy. It's an important day that reminds us that we must be diligent in our pursuit of equality. On February 1, 1960, four African American university students sat down at a lunch counter in North Carolina. After they were refused service, they staged a peaceful protest, a sit-in that inspired people in the United States and around the world to stand up for equality. These four students helped



change the way we think about discourse and civil disobedience. They changed the way we approach our differences.

It was just a few years before these students sat at that lunch counter that university students in Bangladesh helped to lead the movement asserting the right to use the Bangla language, a movement that changed history for all Bangladeshis and established International Mother Language Day for the entire world.

Just like the young Bangladeshi leaders before you, and just like the student activists at that lunch counter; as you graduate today and start the next step in your journey, I urge you to see it as your responsibility to find ways to serve. Find where your passion meets your communities' and the world's greatest needs.

I challenge you to develop new technologies, build socially responsible companies, and conduct the research necessary to explain the world around us. You have the resources, the opportunity, and the responsibility to better your community, your country, and the world. Be open to wherever your path may lead, be open to new ideas and new relationships, and never, ever let your passion fade.

Once again, thank you for letting me be part of your celebration. Congratulations on all of your hard work and to all of you graduating today.

Thank you!